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Patrick X Disney 07/08/2006 08:21:36 AM From DB/Inbox: Patrick X
Disney

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS MUSCAT 01064

SIPDIS
MUSCATCX:
ACTION: POLE
INFO: OMC DAO DCM AMB PAO POLM

DISSEMINATION: POLE
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:GGRAPPO
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FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6847
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

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STATE FOR S/GAC, NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [TBIO](#) [KHIV](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: CURRENT STATE OF HIV/AIDS PROGRAMS IN OMAN

REF: 04 MUSCAT 983

Summary

1. A UNICEF report outlining its next five-year plan for Oman, done in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, provided updated statistics on the AIDS picture. While HIV rates remain low and numerically static, incidence of other sexually transmitted diseases is rising. The Ministry of Health has committed to addressing HIV/AIDS through a National Program for HIV/AIDS/STD Control, utilizing in particular a toll-free information hotline to answer questions from the population. End Summary.

AIDS in Oman

2. According to the April 2006 UNICEF report, there are currently 845 registered cases of HIV, which leads authorities to believe the actual number of HIV cases in Oman to be approximately 1,200. Out of a population of 2.3 million, this represents a prevalence rate of 0.1 percent in the critical 15-49 age group, placing Oman solidly in the ranks of low-prevalence nations. The most troubling aspect is that incidence of sexually transmitted diseases has risen markedly in recent years: going from 33 per 100,000 persons in 2000 to 72 in 2003.

3. Polls show that the number of new HIV cases per year remains constant at around 80, with transmission by sexual activity (homo/heterosexual) accounting for 62% of all cases. Intravenous drug use accounts for 4%, mother-to-child

transmission makes up 4%, multiple modes account for 12%, and 26% of cases are of unknown origin. In the last ten years, more than 90% of AIDS cases in Oman were contracted through sexual intercourse and drugs. According to one survey of Omani 16-18 year-olds, 99.0% of males and 98.3% of females have some knowledge of AIDS. Oman and UNICEF have set as their goal by 2010 to reduce the number of young people living with HIV by 25 percent.

AIDS Programs in the Sultanate

¶4. The Ministry of Health has acknowledged the need to address HIV/AIDS in Oman, and has instituted a public awareness campaign with facts about the disease, its methods of transmission, and options for treatment. The state-run Educational Resources Center is heavily involved in tackling the problem, with its most successful program being the toll-free HIV/AIDS/STD information hotline (funded in part by a Dutch government grant). The hotline provides confidential counseling, and arranges for free voluntary testing and treatment. Average monthly call volumes range greatly between 15 and 40, with increases in volume directly related to promotional activities such as a recent text-messaging campaign, after which the call volume spiked to 2,000.

Who are the callers and what to they ask?

¶5. According to the operators, only about 20-35% of callers are females. More than 60% of callers do not know how the disease is transmitted, with some knowing nothing at all about prevention measures. Negative attitudes and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS were also noted. For the most part, callers want to know more about transmission and prevention of the disease. Although there are not enough human resources to cover the needs of the hotline, UNICEF has dubbed Oman's hotline service "the best equipped in the Middle East and North Africa Region." The Ministry of Health has committed to fighting HIV/AIDS in Oman, and pledged to maintain support for the services that will ultimately benefit the Omani people, particularly the youth. According to UNICEF, the Millennium Development Goal targets for Oman appear to be within reach, with commendable progress made. The national Program for HIV/AIDS/STD Control website may be found through www.moh.gov.om.
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